

What was it that attracted Joseph to Mary? He was certainly attracted to her truth, beauty, and goodness. And unbeknownst to Joseph, Mary was without sin. There was an indescribable aura, a glow that surrounded her. She radiated joy with her noble virtue. She was a woman of faith deeply in love with God. Rightly, Joseph put her on a pedestal for she was the holiest young woman that he had ever encountered.

The Gospel tells us that Mary was betrothed to Joseph. “Betrothal was the first part of the marriage, constituting a man and woman as husband and wife.” Before God, they had made known their promises to be faithful to one another in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health until death do them part. “For the 1st century Jewish culture, this was the definitive point when the man and woman became husband and wife.” The only way to dissolve the marriage at this point is by death or divorce. “The betrothal was followed some months later by the husband’s taking his wife into his home, at which time normal married life began.”<sup>ii</sup>

Together they shared a chaste love for one another and for God. They prayed in common for the long awaited coming of the Messiah little realizing how God would use them to fulfill his plans for salvation.

Mary was filled with joy as she accepted God’s plan for her life. “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior” (Luke 1:46-47). Mary learned of God’s plan through the Angel Gabriel and instinctively she held this secret within her until such time as the angel of the Lord would also reveal God’s plan to Joseph. Mary understood she must keep everything secret for a while. Without knowing why, Joseph was all the more attracted to Mary for now she carried the Divine Word within her, a tiny embryo growing moment by moment, day by day, month by month.

The Gospels tell us that Mary went in haste to see her cousin Elizabeth, and there she was greeted with joyful acceptance because Elizabeth also experienced firsthand an impossible pregnancy made possible by a loving God who had a divine plan for her own son, John the Baptist. Joseph learns of the pregnancy much later.

“One day Joseph took notice of what were obvious indications that Mary must be with child. He was deeply shaken and disturbed by this... Help me, oh my God! Help your servant! Enlighten me so that I may understand, for I am unable to draw any different conclusions from what I see so clearly with my own eyes!”<sup>iii</sup> Anxiety, worry and doubt entered his mind.

Mary could sense her betrothed suffering from suspicion and yet all she could do was pray for the Lord to reveal his plan to Joseph. The Lord tested the faith and patience of Joseph.

Joseph wondered, “What shall I do? I cannot denounce her as the law prescribes, for I am certain of her great holiness. I simply cannot think anything evil of her. But in as much as I know nothing of the origin of this child, and I myself have no part therein, I do not wish to acknowledge the same as my own offspring... I feel compelled to separate from her in order to be freed of this great anxiety.”<sup>iiii</sup> Resolving to divorce Mary quietly, Joseph prayed to God for insight and understanding.

That very night “the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:20-21).

With tears of relief streaming down his face, Joseph finally understood. God’s silence ended and divine revelation enlightened his mind. Anxiety gave way to rejoicing. Joseph recognized the promises made to King David 28 generations earlier would finally be fulfilled.

The Messiah is coming. Joseph himself will be part of God's plan in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

With insight into his own weakness, there are also tears of sorrow and contrition. "Oh my God, how ungrateful have I been for the great blessing you have granted to me through the gift of so worthy a creature as my beloved Mary. I was foolhardy and unappreciative in intending to go away and forget her. If you had not disclosed the great mystery to me, I would have departed and foolishly squandered my happiness. What would have become of me, so miserable a creature? Oh my God!"<sup>iv</sup> Please forgive my sins.

With an understanding of God's plan, Joseph experiences a resurrection in his own life. Anxiety, doubt, and suffering are gone. He rejoices in the beauty of his betrothed who is the worthy Mother of God. He rejoices in his Son, the promised Messiah. He rejoices in God's faith in him. Joseph had prayed for the coming of the Messiah never realizing that he and Mary were part of God's divine plan. With Mary at his side, Joseph will be the loving father who helps to shape Jesus as he grows from infancy through his childhood to become a young man on a mission to save the world. In his love for God, in his love for Mary, and in his love for Jesus, Joseph will show all humanity what an earthly father can be. "Blessed are those who dwell in your house, O Lord; they never cease to praise you" (Ps 84:5).

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<sup>i</sup> [catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=7535](http://catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=7535)

<sup>ii</sup> The Life of Saint Joseph, 119.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid 123,124.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid 126,127.